

determine which vehicles can be killed and which cannot. Moreover, commanders must understand that the Dragon is a system of last resort against concentrated armor formations, and that it should be used more against lightly armored vehicles and stationary non-armored targets such as bunkers and fortifications.

Until the AAWS-M (antiarmor weapon system-medium) is fielded, light infantry units that are deployed in areas with a high armored threat should be reinforced with a more effective tank killing capability. But so long as the Army equips units with the Dragon, the commanders and their soldiers must understand its limitations and train to overcome

them. To do otherwise is to invite destruction.

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The Infantry Spectrum

Crossing from Light to Mech

CAPTAIN THOMAS E. FISH

When I was a lieutenant leading a light infantry platoon, "mech" was a four-letter word, one that I fervently hoped would never be applied to me. I had some pretty fixed ideas about the mechanized infantry, none of them flattering.

Young lieutenants, and other officers, can be very ethno-centric about their own little slice of the infantry spectrum. But those who get to stay on one side or the other of this spectrum are few and far between. Eventually, the great majority of us must cross over.

When I learned I was being assigned to the 3d Armored Division in Germany, I wrote a hasty letter to my former brigade commander who had been a mechanized battalion commander. His first bit of advice was, "Learn the equipment; try to swing a job as the battalion motor officer (BMO) before they give you a company." As it turned out, though, my first job in my new battalion was to command a rifle company, and "on-the-job training" suddenly took on a whole new meaning.

What follows is a distillation of the colonel's advice, that of my current battalion commander, and a few of my own observations. If you are a light leader bound for mech country and company com-

mand, this may serve as a useful guide.

The link between light and mech, and the key to making a successful transition from light platoon leader to mechanized company commander, is our AirLand Battle doctrine. The tenets of this doctrine and the fundamentals explained in Field Manual 100-5 provide the guideposts. An officer, if he has a thorough understanding of this doctrine, can see how light and heavy forces fit together as pieces of a whole. And there is no mistaking the common threads that bind them. The "imperatives of modern combat," for example, are the same for all levels of command in the Army. Once you understand the principles under which the Army as a whole will fight, you can move more easily from one part of it to another.

TECHNIQUES VARY

While light and heavy forces are bound together under AirLand Battle doctrine and the basic infantry tasks, the techniques that leaders in these units use to apply combat power to accomplish their missions vary widely.

In positioning weapons, for example, a light platoon leader replaces his M60

machineguns to cover the most likely dismounted avenues of approach and positions his Dragons to cover the mounted avenue of approach, if there is one. He then assigns sectors to each of his three squads that provide mutual support and protect his key weapons. Within the platoon, the fighting positions are seldom more than 30 meters apart. The mission is usually to retain a piece of ground or to destroy enemy forces in a narrow sector.

A Bradley company commander is usually given much more space than his light counterpart. He has 13 BFVs to position, and each vehicle requires at least two fighting positions 50 meters apart. He uses his dismount troops—armed with squad automatic weapons, M203 grenade launchers, Dragons, and AT-4 antiarmor weapons—to provide flank and rear security, to observe the battlefield while the Bradleys take up hide positions, and to cover the dismounted avenues of approach. Often a mechanized platoon's dismounted elements are lumped together instead of being employed as squads, and a platoon leader must then divide his attention between his mounted and dismounted elements.

Both light and heavy forces must also

have security to survive, but their techniques for achieving it are decidedly different:

A light fighter depends almost entirely on stealth. In the defense he uses mostly passive means such as camouflage and noise and light discipline to protect himself from enemy observation. He does much the same during offensive operations, using the same skills as a deer hunter to flow across the terrain.

A mechanized warrior, because his machines make distinct signatures, must develop other means of security. He relies a great deal on deception, both in the offense and in the defense, and also on speed.

In the defense, his vehicles can remain undiscovered in hide positions, then quickly move forward to fighting positions, fire, and move again. In the attack, he can do his damage and be gone before the enemy can react.

His survival also depends on skilled dismounted soldiers conducting patrols out front to destroy enemy reconnaissance forces, clear danger areas, and use their rifles and bayonets to destroy the enemy's dismounted infantry.

Leaders in both kinds of units can use various tactical techniques in employing their assets in accordance with AirLand Battle doctrine. If an officer succeeds as a light infantry platoon leader, it is because he has learned to accomplish a lot with limited materiel assets. That same resourcefulness and imagination, when applied to the business of using Bradleys and Abrams tanks to destroy Soviet BMPs (armored personnel carriers) and T-80 tanks, for example, will also help him succeed as a mechanized infantry company commander.

When I first arrived, the most striking difference I noticed between my new mechanized environment and my former light one, besides being in a foreign country, was the multitude of great metal monsters parked across the street from my new battalion. I fully understood, then, why I had been advised to try to get a job as battalion motor officer before commanding a company.

Preparing for and conducting a change of command inventory helped; at least I learned how much "stuff" I had and

what it was called.

Then it was time for me to get into the motor pool and ask lots of stupid questions. I was honest with my soldiers. I told them I had just come from another world and I was going to get in their way until I was satisfied that I understood *their* world. They didn't mind my poking around the motor pool or constantly asking questions. In fact, I think they would have been worried if I had acted otherwise.

So, in going from light to mechanized infantry, rule number one is "get greasy and ask questions." It doesn't take too long to learn, and it feels good once you do. Even if you don't walk into a company command position or start off as a battalion motor officer, you can become familiar with your battalion's modified table of organization and equipment and visit different companies during command motor stables to get a better feel for the battalion's equipment and maintenance procedures.

FASTER

Aside from the "metal monsters," the next most immediate difference was in the field, where things in the mechanized world move much faster, especially with the Bradley. This speed forces a former light fighter to make two important adjustments.

The first adjustment is to learn to navigate faster than a 3.5-mile-per-hour walking pace, or you will get lost zooming around at 35 miles per hour in a "track." As my new battalion commander pointed out, this is not too difficult if you practice on your own in your jeep or HMMWV (high mobility multipurpose wheeled vehicle) and think *big*.

Navigating from a vehicle is similar to navigating from a helicopter (something all light infantry platoon leaders learn to do), except that you don't have as good a view. You concentrate on large terrain features, and you think in terms of kilometers instead of meters. Seldom will you do an entire exercise using the same map sheet. (My battalion commander still

laughs about my first encounter with "the giant map.")

The second adjustment is to speed up your thinking. This process is necessary not only to keep up with the speed of your vehicles but also to *keep up with the pace* of events. The tactical situations are more fluid, and units have larger areas of responsibility. More things can happen in one minute than used to happen to your light unit in an hour.

Mostly, it just takes time to get acclimated. But there are some things that can help you condense your decision cycle. Think about probable situations and possible courses of action before you get into an active environment. Have frequent tactical discussions with the leaders around you. Develop good SOPs and stick to basic battle drills that can be adapted to many situations. When in the field, concentrate on controlling the battle, and rely heavily on your first sergeant and company XO to coordinate the rest of the show. Don't clutter your mind with peripheral events, so long as your two chief assistants can handle them.

This brings us to another fundamental difference between your days as a light platoon leader and your current position. A platoon leader or company commander in a light unit can be, and is expected to be, largely self-sufficient. He can load his troops up with MREs (meals, ready to eat), water, and ammunition, and operate on his own for several days, so long as he can find some natural sources of water. During sustained low intensity operations, an occasional helicopter resupply can keep him going.

As my battalion S-4 pointed out to me recently, though, the amount and types of equipment that require maintenance, together with high rates of fuel and ammunition consumption, tie the mechanized company commander to his battalion trains. This means that he must make more of an effort to incorporate logistics into his planning and force this system to work for him. Otherwise, his company won't be able to fight.

Additionally, a mechanized team can run into Murphy's Law in a big way. One thrown track or stuck vehicle can not only take a whole squad out of the action, but can also require the diversion of a large

amount of combat power at a critical time. Again, we see the importance of a strong XO and first sergeant, who are responsible for making sure the company is sustained without hindering its unity of effort.

While a mechanized company's numerous vehicles and weapons give its commander many opportunities, they also expose him to the ever-present danger of becoming overwhelmed or tied down by these machines. Soldiers are still the most important resource, and infantry soldiers need hard training.

As a mechanized infantry commander, you must constantly balance the requirements for mounted and dismounted training. Although the small unit tactical focus in mechanized units is on platoons rather than squads, the role of noncommissioned officers here is no less important than it is in light units. In fact, the Bradley adds even more individual and team tasks that sergeants must teach their

soldiers, and requires the commander to manage a multi-dimensional training program. And don't forget—there is just as much of a requirement for good physical conditioning in heavy as in light units.

At first glance, it may appear that the different ends of the infantry spectrum are too far apart, too alien, for an officer to make a successful transition from one end to the other. But they have more important things in common than they have differences: Infantry soldiers are still infantry soldiers, and sound leadership is still sound leadership. Common sense is still at a premium, and NCOs are still the backbone of the company. There are still plenty of foot marches; marksmanship will always be the pre-eminent individual skill of the infantryman; and dismounted infiltration onto key terrain can still be a devastating "ace in the hole."

It is not difficult to cross from light to "mech" if you realize that the warrior spirit is the same in both kinds of units

and if you put forth just a little extra effort.

Meanwhile, for those of you in the Officer Advanced Course, use your time wisely. While the course can be a little slow at times, the small-group tactical instruction gives you an opportunity to absorb a lot of information about mechanized and combined arms operations at company, battalion, and brigade levels.

The biggest obstacle in your way will be the old "light" prejudice that "mech" is a four-letter word. It is better to remember that smart infantry is the best infantry, whether it walks or rolls.

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Lessons on the BIFV

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During a battalion ARTEP at the Hohenfels Training Area in Germany, I had my first real experience as a second lieutenant in the tactical employment of the Bradley infantry fighting vehicle (BIFV). Up to that time, my only experience with it had been what I had learned in the Bradley Commander's Course at Fort Benning and on one training exercise. From the training at Hohenfels, I discovered that, although the BIFV has an incredible amount of firepower and mobility, it is neither indestructible nor all-destroying.

This discovery grew out of some specific lessons that helped me survive longer and accomplish the mission better. Although there is nothing new about

these lessons, they do offer, through one lieutenant's actual experience, a more realistic understanding of the basics of Bradley employment that may be helpful to others who are just coming into Bradley units.

The training at Hohenfels was conducted in three phases—train-up, ARTEPs, and opposing force (OPFOR). During each phase, the units executed four main tactical scenarios—a hasty attack, a deliberate defense, a deliberate night attack, and a hasty defense. The lessons I learned are presented within these four scenarios.

Hasty Attack:

- Never engage a tank while it is scanning in your direction. It will find and

destroy your BIFV long before your BIFV can acquire and engage it with a TOW. A BIFV can destroy a tank only if the tank is preoccupied or looking in another direction, or if the vehicle's dismounted troops get a sneak shot with their Dragons.

- Never skyline a BIFV. Even if the enemy can't engage the vehicle with direct fire, he will determine its location and target it with indirect fire. Therefore, to locate targets from a reverse slope position, you must dismount and observe or send out an observation post team to call back the target information. Once you acquire the targets, move up and engage them, and promptly return to the reverse slope. After your BIFV makes